



*Meriwether
Lewis*

**US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS
and the
LEWIS AND CLARK
BICENTENNIAL COMMEMORATION**



William Clark

“REUNION AT THE HOME OF SAKAKAWEA”

Signature Event
New Town, North Dakota
August 17-20, 2006

Background: In 2000, the National Council for the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial decided to highlight some of the more nationally significant festivals and events and call them “Signature Events”. These events were to be those of nationwide historical significance, have the potential of high visitation, and be multicultural in nature. The “Reunion at the Home of Sakakawea” was designated as the fourteenth of these Signature Events. The event was held in New Town, North Dakota. The weather for the event was hot with daily temperatures in the mid to upper 80’s.

The Signature Event was actually in two parts which are described below.

North Dakota Youth Rendezvous

Associated with but immediately prior to the Signature Event, the North Dakota National Guard sponsored a “Youth Rendezvous.” Based upon individual state results of a nationwide essay contest, all 50 states and 3 U.S. territories had up to 10 participants at this event. The contest was open to all students entering their senior year in high school. Participants wrote essays on “How the modern Army values contributed to the success of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.”

Each day, the participants in the rendezvous rotated through one of three areas – Bismarck/Mandan/Fort Abraham Lincoln; Washburn/Knife River/Cross Ranch; or Medora. The Corps participation was solely in Medora - “The Army Then and Now” where the 1803 Army of the Lewis and Clark Expedition was contrasted with the modern Army.

Members of the Corps’ Captain Lewis’ Company provided costumed interpretation at the event site. COE participants in this endeavor were Ed Shirley (SWF); Jon Carlson (NWP); and Ken Wilk (NWK). Also participating were members of the Frontier Army Living History Association (FAHLA) (Eric Matthews and Steve Allie). During the 3-day event, 600 interpretive contacts were made in camp.

Located under a stand on cottonwood trees, the encampment illustrated the military aspects of the expedition and included mending clothes, making moccasins, cleaning guns, etc. Unfortunately, because of the “high fire danger” category, no campfires were

allowed. Therefore, cooking and casting lead balls were not undertaken at this event. However, the various stations did give the general public more of an accurate idea what the L&C encampment might have been like.

Jean Nauss (NWO) was also present at this portion of the Signature Event. Although originally scheduled to do formal programs (“Seven Army Values”) several times during the day, because of the very tight schedules of the participants, this did not happen. Instead, during the lunch breaks, Ms. Nauss visited with the participants and discussed the values. Roughly 150 interpretive contacts were made.

Signature Event

Held at the Four Bears Casino and the adjacent peninsula, organizers estimated that roughly 25,000 people attended this portion of the event. Although there were some panel discussions during the day, the primary focus of this event was the evening Powwow.

The Corps was involved in 3 venues during this commemorative event – the Opening ceremonies, the exhibit, and the Tent of Many Voices.

Opening Ceremonies – LTC Joel Cross, NWO District Engineer, represented BG Martin at the Opening. LTC Cross participated in and was recognized in the formal Grand Entry Procession. In addition, he participated in the Grand Entry for the Powwow on Thursday and (along with BG Martin) Friday evening.

Exhibit - The COE representatives manning the exhibit were Jean Nauss (NWO), Ken Wilk (NWK), Ed Shirley (SWF) and Jon Carlson (NWP). Also assisting were members of FALHA - Eric Matthews and Steve Allie. Approximately 2115 interpretive contacts were made at the display.

The Corps exhibit consisted of the following:

Bicentennial backdrop - The display backdrop consisted of three panels and had messages about the expedition, COE missions, and the environment.

Discovery Box - This was displayed to give the visiting public some idea of the kinds of things taken and found during the expedition.

Artifacts from “History Tent” Display – Some COE representatives have acquired artifacts and replicas of the period representing the items taken on the expedition. These were also on display and generated many questions.

Brochures – A variety of printed materials allowed visitors to take additional information home with them about the COE and L&C.

TOMV – Ed Shirley (SWF) represented the Corps by doing 2 programs in the Tent of Many Voices. With his program entitled “Beavers, Bison, and Bears – Provisioning for the Expedition”, Mr. Shirley made 85 interpretive contacts.

Lessons learned

Rendezvous

1. Having 3 venues set so far apart (Bismarck, Washburn, Medora) and because the evening activities at each site went so late, it made it a very early morning for the participants. By the time they got to Medora mid-morning, they were already tired.
2. There was way too much for the students to do in Medora. The Medora venue was again divided into 3 parts – Chimney Park (where the COE camp and NG equipment were located), Downtown Medora (with ND Cowboy Hall of Fame, X-Box Army simulations, and Chateau de Mores), and the high ropes course. There were quite a number of things to see and do at each of these 3 smaller venues. Because all of the chaperones did not understand what our camp was about or were not interested in the historical aspect, not all of the students had the opportunity to go through the camp. Fewer things to do and a specified time to visit each individual site within the venues would have made this event much better for everyone.
3. Scheduling 5 speakers (Ms Nauss plus reenactors portraying Abraham Lincoln, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson and Teddy Roosevelt) all at the same time during the lunch hour was futile. Each speaker should have been given a specific time to speak to all members of the group.
4. The gunfight (given 3 times each day) was entertaining. However, it did not involve any military so there was some question as to what this particular event had to do with the “Army Then and Now”. All of the students had to see this presentation but they were not mandated to see/do anything else in the Medora area other than the high ropes course.

New Town

1. The exhibitors and vendors using the Events Center in the casino building were all told that setup was anytime after 1pm on Wednesday, Aug 16. However, upon arriving, there was a meeting in progress and all were told that no one could set up until Thursday morning just before the event was to start. There should have been much better coordination on this point.
2. On the initial registration form, all were informed that only 2 badges for vendors/exhibitors would be issued to each vendor. All others would cost an additional \$5 each. No badges were ever seen so the extra money that was paid was totally unnecessary. There was also a \$50 cleanup deposit required. However, it was discovered that this was primarily for the food vendors. Again, there was no distinction between the food vendors and the exhibitors inside the building.
3. There were very few signs around the casino area showing where different things were taking place. In addition, on Saturday morning, the small sandwich board outside of the casino events area (where the exhibitors were set up) had been manually altered saying that the vendor area would be open from “9am-9pm (or midnight)” without any notice to the vendors or exhibitors. While there were a few vendors that stayed open until 9pm, all of the exhibitors closed at 6pm as in the original contract. This made it very confusing for the visitors that night.
4. There was very little marketing of the event. There were a few signs on the highways within the TAT reservation but none had the location of the event. The advertisement in

L&C Trail Heritage Foundation magazine “We Proceeded On” appeared after the Signature Event was over.

5. There were no sleeping rooms for the exhibitors at the Four Bears Casino. Most of the exhibitors had to stay in either Watford City or Minot – roughly 50-85 miles away, respectively. This added another 1 to 1-1/2 hours of drive time on either end of an already long day.

6. The original contract said that the hours of the event were from 10am to 6pm daily. However, on Sunday morning, the exhibitors were told that it didn’t matter how long they stayed and we could disassemble any time. All of the exhibitors collectively decided to stay open until 4pm – the time of the final Grand Entry and Powwow results. However, at 1:30pm, staff from the hotel/casino complex came into the vendor area and started taking down all of the pipe and drape. With the noise and ruckus, everyone finally gave up and tore down their exhibits at 2pm.

7. The SE organizers were extremely difficult to reach for questions and information even during the planning phase of the event. Phone calls were rarely returned and emails rarely answered. Repeated efforts by the COE were made to assist with various aspects of the event. Most were met with a non-response. Deadlines for COE participation came and went with no response from the SE organizers until weeks after the fact. Although site visits were conducted in May 2005 with Scott Eagle and Dominic Sillitti, the official SE organizers did not recognize these efforts until much later

Future outcome: The next event will be the final Signature Event which will take place in St. Louis, MO on Sept 22-24, 2006. The Corps and Army will have a sizeable presence at this event based on the discussions that have already taken place with the Organizing Committee.

Final thoughts: This could have been a very worthwhile event. However, because the SE organizers were unable/unwilling to meet with the Federal agencies, none of the lessons learned from other events were taken into account.

Jeannine M. Nauss
National Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Coordinator